

Preview: The 45th Chicago International Film Festival, Week Two

Submitted by [BrianTT](#) [1] on October 14, 2009 - 10:41am

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CHICAGO – The second week of The 45th Chicago Film Festival kicks off tonight (or tomorrow depending on how you look at the fest that runs from the 8th to the 22nd) and the upcoming weekend features just as much and arguably more interesting films unspooling at the AMC River East than the first. Highlights include one of the best animated films of the year, a bittersweet romance starring two living legends, a remastered classic, and works from a few of the best voices in international cinema today.

We’ve worked our way through dozens of films this year, but even we couldn’t get to all of them and a few weren’t even shown in the screening room in time for our deadline. So this week’s ClIFF preview works a little differently. The first page features the best of what we’ve seen. Take our word. These are worth your time. The second page features films we didn’t get to or weren’t offered but that we’re hoping to catch up with soon. Maybe we’ll see you at the theater this weekend.

The top tier of second week offerings includes, not necessarily in order, a remastered print of Alfred Hitchcock’s “North by Northwest,” Adam Elliott’s “Mary and Max,” Nicholas Fackler’s “Lovely, Still,” Francois Ozon’s “Ricky,” Carlos Carrera’s “Backyard,” Andrea Arnold’s “Fish Tank,” and Maria Prochazkova’s “Who’s Afraid of the Wolf?” With films from the United States, Australia, Mexico, United Kingdom, and the Czech Republic, the second weekend truly displays the international flavor of the fest.

Second week offerings we couldn’t get to but want to see (synopsis and play date info on page two) include, once again in no particular order, Lukas Moodysson’s “Mammoth,” Lee Daniels’ “Precious: Based on the Book ‘Push’ by Sapphire,” Tsai Ming-Liang’s “Face,” Hirokazu Kore-eda’s “Air Doll,” Tom Ford’s “A Single Man,” and the Closing Night film, Jean-Marc Vallee’s “The Young Victoria”.



“Mary and Max”
October 18th, 6:15pm
October 20th, 6pm

Very few films this year, inside or out of the film festival, will connect with viewers as completely as the lovely “Mary and Max,” a claymation film with grown-up themes featuring voice work by Phillip Seymour Hoffman and Toni Collette. The latter voices Mary Dinkle, an Australian girl with an alcoholic mother and a distant father. She’s lonely, pudgy, and confused about the way the world works with no one to guide her. She randomly grabs an address out of a New York phone book and sends a rambling, inquisitive letter to Mr. Max Horowitz (Hoffman, doing some of the best voice work in the history of the form), a 44-year-old obese, lonely man who happens to have Asperger’s Syndrome. The two form a

bond over hundreds of miles that lasts decades and literally shapes the course of their entire lives. Shockingly moving without ever being manipulative, “Mary and Max” is a thing of absolute beauty that will, sadly, probably never play on the big screen in Chicago outside of this weekend. Don’t miss it.



Lovely, Still

Photo credit: The Chicago International Film Festival

“Lovely, Still”

October 17th, 5pm

I’m torn about my response to the overall film that is the poignant “Lovely, Still,” but it undeniably features two of the best performances to come out of this year’s fest from living legends Martin Landau and Ellen Burstyn. Landau is in town for the fest to support a remastered print of “North by Northwest” (more on that below) and he also brings a 2009 film. Think about that for a minute. Unlike a lot of actors, Landau isn’t just relying on his classics. He’s seeking out new, challenging roles, and he gives one of his best performances in a long time as Robert Malone, a man who comes home one night to find a stranger (the still-luminous Ellen Burstyn) in his living room. The two form a sweet, beautiful relationship, seemingly proving that love knows no age. The final act of “Lovely, Still” features a twist that I feel is a little cheap, using something serious in a manipulative way. Storytelling problems aside, Landau and Burstyn do more with one conversation over dinner than most actors do with an entire script. Their work alone warrants a look at “Lovely, Still”.



Ricky

Photo credit: The Chicago International Film Festival

“Ricky”

October 14th, 4pm

October 20th, 5pm

Francois Ozon (“Swimming Pool,” “8 Women”) is an acquired taste. Some love his quirky, cinematic approach to storytelling. The only thing you know for sure going into an Ozon film is that it’s not going to be predictable or dull. And that’s enough for me to love the guy and his work. Earlier this year, Ozon’s “Angel” unspooled at the EU Film Fest and now it’s followed by a clear bookend. Ozon follows a lavish, romantic production called “Angel” with a realistic, darker film about an actual angel called “Ricky”. Featuring great performances (including Sergi Lopez of “Pan’s Labyrinth”), the title character of “Ricky” is a baby who miraculously sprouts wings. Yes, images of a baby circling a grocery store are ridiculous, but there’s something so unique about Ozon’s vision of finding the fantastic in something as mundane as the start of a working class family. “Ricky” is certainly flawed - it feels oddly incomplete and might have played better as a short film - but there’s too much here that works to ignore the film. Like most Ozon.



North by Northwest

*Photo credit: The Chicago International Film Festival***“North by Northwest”**

October 18th, 5pm

If we need to tell you why a remastered print of “North by Northwest” is a film festival highlight, the sky is a different color in your world. One of the most influential and straight-up enjoyable thrillers ever made, Hitchcock’s film is being released on Blu-Ray on November 3rd (we’ll have a review for you around then) and this screening serves as a prelude to that HD release. It’s the 50th anniversary of this Oscar-nominated thriller that will be accompanied by a retrospective conversation with Martin Landau and Hitchcock historian and biographer John Russell Taylor. Meticulously restored and remastered for this release with Warner Bros. Motion Picture Imaging scanning the original VistaVision production elements in 8K resolution, the resulting presentation reveals a depth of field and clarity never before possible, serving to heighten every thrill-packed moment. We haven’t seen the new print or the Blu-Ray yet, but we’ve seen the movie plenty of times and it’s inclusion in the fest is an undeniable highlight.



Backyard

*Photo credit: The Chicago International Film Festival***“Backyard”**

October 15th, 6:30pm

October 16th, 9:15pm

October 20th, 3pm

From a classic to a dark, Mexican film that will rattle everyone in the audience, Carlos Carrera’s “Backyard” is a brutal, vicious experience, one that could have as many theater goers running for the doors as the controversial “Antichrist”. The scary thing about this accomplished thriller is that it’s all true. The director of previous fest entry “The Crime of Father Amaro” returns with an expansive, challenging, dense film about the value of life on the border. The fact is that in an area of the world where human beings are basically seen as worthless - used for sex or drug trafficking - women have it worst of all. In the border town of Juarez, literally hundreds of women have gone missing or turned up dead in the desert in the last decade. “Backyard” is a shocking, disturbing true story of a new police captain (Ana de la Reguera) determined to stop the savagery on the border and learning that it runs much deeper than anyone imagined. Jimmy Smits also stars in this film that can sometimes get too complex, runs too long, and is literally hard to watch at times, but it’s an ambitious dark movie unlike any other at this year’s fest. It’s a downer, the emotional opposite of “Mary and Max,” but it’s a well-made one about an important true story.



Fish Tank

Photo credit: The Chicago International Film Festival

“Fish Tank”

October 14th, 8:40pm
October 15th, 6:15pm

If you don't yet know the name Andrea Arnold than you probably haven't seen “Red Road”. You should correct that as soon as possible. Arnold follows up that amazing debut by shattering the sophomore slump and telling another dark story of the working class in England. Arnold is one of the most important voices in British cinema today, winning the Oscar for her great short film “Wasp,” and now delivering two nearly-perfect dark dramas. “Fish Tank” stars Katie Jarvis, giving an amazing debut performance, as Mia, a girl bored with life in her very rough Essex housing project. She's emotional, alienated, and unlike anyone around her. She's drawn to her mother's charming new boyfriend Connor (Michael Fassbender, so great in “Hunger” an “Inglourious Basterds” earlier this year). Arnold continues to walk the line between social realism and riveting filmmaking. She's only made two-and-a-half films, but her output so far is good enough that whenever she brings a film to the fest, it should be considered a highlight.



Who's Afraid of the Wolf?

Photo credit: The Chicago International Film Festival

“Who's Afraid of the Wolf?”

October 16th, 5:45pm
October 17th, 4:00pm
October 20th, 4:15pm

We thought we should end the highlight section of our coverage of The 45th Chicago International Film Festival with a film that represents a very important part of the film fest experience - exposure to work from a country that you may not see again and a film that probably won't play in Chicago outside of this weekend. Even Facets and Siskel don't program a lot of films from the Czech Republic, although their film industry seems to have been more vibrant in recent years (they played a major role in EU Film Fest earlier this year). Director Maria Prochazkova brings her fantastical fairy tale for all ages to the fest and it's a flawed-but-fascinating work, a movie that displays as much imagination behind the camera as its young heroine does in the film itself. Young Terezka is at that age where parents start to get real confusing and she starts to basically imagine her life as a scary Grimm's fairy tale. Her imagination runs wild and the resulting film is a sometimes delightful display of the importance of listening to international voices.

Click on to page two for some “unseen but intriguing” highlights and stay tuned to HollywoodChicago.com for continuing coverage of the 45th Chicago International Film Festival.

All synopsis information official from the 45th Chicago International Film Festival.



Mammoth

*Photo credit: The Chicago International Film Festival***“Mammoth”**

October 14th, 6pm

October 17th, 8:45pm

Michelle Williams and Gael García Bernal star in this riveting, Babel-esque drama about the fate of the nuclear family in the age of globalization. An affluent, overworked New York couple relies on their Filipino nanny to care for their young daughter, while in the Philippines her own children grow up motherless. Meanwhile in Thailand a young mother turns to the sex trade to support her faraway daughter. In the space of a few days, the ties binding them all will be tested in life-changing ways.

“Precious: Based on the Book ‘Push’ by Sapphire”

Set in Harlem in 1987, Precious: Based on the Novel ‘Push’ by Sapphire is the story of a 16-year-old African American girl born into a life no one would want. Claireece “Precious” Jones (Gabourey Sidibe) is pregnant for the second time by her absent father. At home, she must wait hand and foot on her abusive and poisonously angry mother (Mo’Nique). School is a place of chaos, and Precious has reached the ninth grade with an awful secret: She can neither read nor write. Precious may sometimes be down, but she is never out. Winner of three awards at Sundance, Precious is a vibrant, honest and resoundingly hopeful film about the human capacity to grow and overcome.

“Face”

October 14th, 8:30pm

October 15th, 8:15pm

October 19th, 3:15pm

A four-time award winner at the Festival, master Tsai Ming-Liang (Goodbye, Dragon Inn; What Time Is It Over There?) returns with a sumptuously staged, boldly visual film about a Taiwanese filmmaker who casts French actors in his latest disaster-fraught film—despite not speaking a word of French. An artistic tip of the hat to François Truffaut and the spirit of the New Wave, Face stars Truffaut regulars Jean-Pierre L  aud and Fanny Ardant.



Air Doll

Photo credit: The Chicago International Film Festival

“Air Doll”

October 17th, 3:30pm
October 18th, 5:30pm
October 19th, 3pm

The internationally acclaimed director of Nobody Knows, After Life, and Still Walking returns with a romantic fantasy that explores the complexities of love, loneliness, and loss through the story of a life-size inflatable doll. Air doll “Nozomi” is middle-aged loner Hideo’s only companion in life, but when she suddenly comes to life and begins exploring the world on her own, her journey begs the question—what really makes us human?

“A Single Man”

October 19th, 8:30pm

Iconic fashion designer Tom Ford—the mastermind behind designer labels like Gucci, YSL, and his own eponymous line—makes his directorial debut with the richly detailed and aesthetically brilliant A Single Man. Starring Colin Firth and Julianne Moore, the film is set in Los Angeles in 1962 at the height of the Cuban missile crisis. Gay British college professor George Falconer (Firth) is struggling to find meaning to his life after the death of his longtime partner. The story is a romantic tale of love interrupted, the isolation that is an inherent part of the human condition, and ultimately the importance of the seemingly smaller moments in life.

“The Young Victoria”

October 22nd, 7pm

In The Young Victoria, Emily Blunt (The Devil Wears Prada) delivers an incredibly appealing performance as Queen Victoria in the turbulent first years of her reign. Rupert Friend (Pride & Prejudice) portrays Prince Albert, the suitor who wins her heart and becomes her partner in one of history’s greatest romances. This love story, set amongst all the intrigue of the court, also features Paul Bettany (Iron Man, The Da Vinci Code), Miranda Richardson (Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire), Jim Broadbent (The Damned United, The Chronicles of Narnia), Thomas Kretschmann (Valkyrie), and Mark Strong (Sherlock Holmes, Tristan & Isolde).



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